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ABSTRACT

This handbook was written to inform and raise questions among volunteers and paid staff who are new to teaching the undereducated adult learner. In its five sections the handbook discusses some of the more frequently observed characteristics of the undereducated adult, and the implications of these characteristics for adult education teachers as they work to create a supportive environment for profitable learning experiences for their students. The handbook also notes some important differences between adult and child learners, and presents some considerations and suggestions to increase the likelihood of a positive teaching/learning situation. (KC)

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THE ADULT LEARNER

A Handbook for Volunteer and New Adult Education Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Probably the most important responsibility of those who train paid and/or volunteer teachers for adult basic education is to help those we train understand the psychological, sociological, and cultural differences of the men and women whom we will be teaching. Underlying the educational process, at all age levels, is the need for teachers to know their students -- their backgrounds and motivations, their personal characteristics and capabilities. Without that knowledge, even the most skilled teacher cannot do a fully effective job of teaching.

This handbook is an effort to describe some of the more commonly observed characteristics of undereducated adult learners and their implications for adult basic education teachers. It is also a discussion of how adult learners differ from child learners.

We would like to acknowledge that all teachers in adult education classes are routinely faced with great varience in their students' educational backgrounds. The backgrounds of students of ESOL in particular, may range from those who have had little or no formal schooling to those who hold graduate degrees but lack some specific English skills. It is true, however, that in adult basic education classes there are more students with limited formal education than there are students with advanced degrees.

The authors would like to emphasize that the remarks in this handbook are directed toward the teaching of **undereducated** adults, whether these adults are students in ABE, GED, ESOL, or other classes. We have not attempted to address the very different teaching/learning needs and approaches appropriate to well- and formally-educated adult students.

Finally, we would like to remind readers that the contents of this handbook are intended to inform and raise questions in those who are new to teaching the undereducated adult learner. We are aware that veteran adult basic education teachers will encounter little new information here.

I. INFORMATION ABOUT THE ADULT LEARNER WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TEACHER

The following characteristics can be found in varying degrees throughout our society. However, they are characteristics which frequently and consistently appear among undereducted adults in need of basic education. We present them here because they can sometimes negatively influence the attitudes and actions of teachers of adult basic education classes.

LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

Undereducated adults may not have experienced success as children in school or as adults in their work or social life. As a result, as adult learners in our classes, some may at first feel inadequate and unequipped to learn and compete, imagining that the others are more capable than they.

Implications:

Volunteers and teachers should make every effort to help students feel capable and to assure that they experience some measure of success from the very first class session on. One way to accomplish this is to present initial learning activities that are commensurate with students' initial abilities. During their first few class sessions, if students are presented with reading material that is too advanced for their present reading skills, they may experience feelings of inadequacy and discouragement. If, on the other hand, they are given material which they can read with comfortable ease, they will enjoy a feeling of self-confidence that will encourage them to tackle more difficult selections in future class sessions.

It is important that students and teachers work together in deciding what can realistically be achieved by the class as a group and by its individual members. Adults who have been out of school for some time may set unrealistic standards, requiring either too much or too little of themselves. On the other hand, when standards for student achievement are set only by the teacher, students will probably feel anxious about their abilities to live up to them. The anxiety created may result in students dropping out.

Students will benefit if the teacher can help them discover their own best style and their own best pace for approaching and accomplishing learning tasks. It is sometimes helpful to offer a principal task or assignment, then suggest other varied activities which can either be done instead of, or in addition to the principal assigment.

The need to compete with others should be minimized. The backgrounds of adults are far too varied and individual for competition with each other to have anything but a negative effect. The only competition that is valid for the adult learner is competition with self. "Where am I today compared with where I was yesterday, last month, six months ago?"

LACK OF SKILLS

While a few adult education students are very capable in the basic skills, and, at the other end some are illiterate, the majority of adult basic education students have a limited degree of competence in the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Implications:

New teachers and volunteers sometimes error in equating lack of skills with low intelligence. It is important that they be watchful for negative attitudes or actions on their part and direct their energies toward helping students refine and broaden their skills and performance.

FEAR OF SCHOOL

This is common fear among adult learners. It usually stems from a person's unpleasant past experience with school. Common unpleasant experiences may include being placed in a class because of physical size rather than ability; being taunted because of different dress, speech, or physical appearance; being punished or berated for irregular attendance that was unavoidable. Students may also fear being called on and not knowing the "right" answer and being embarrassed in front of peers, being ridiculed by a teacher or classmates because of inability to perform at the same level or pace as the rest of the class, taking tests, and a host of other more nebulous fears.

Associated with the fear of school is the fear of being taught information incompatible with what is accpetable in their immediate living environment. An adult student may risk the ridicule and/or harrassment of spouse or peers with different values from those s/he is aspiring toward. S/he may be realistically apprehensive that resuming his/her education will bring displeasure and resistance on the part of a spouse, and possibly even be threatening to the marriage.

Implications:

Uncritical acceptance of adult students' rates of learning, appearance, language, and any other differences they bring to the class, is valuable in combatting these fears. A teacher can often help students over their fears of incompetence, of making mistakes, of being compared or ridiculed, by emphasizing what students do right and supporting their efforts, whether successful or not. Ridicule or sarcasm should be firmly censored among class members.

INADEQUATE ECONOMIC RESOURCES

There is a high correlation between level of education and level of income. Teachers of undereducated adults in adult basic education classes would do well to remember that some of their students may be living at or below the poverty level. Some may live in crowded conditions, with neither the space nor the quiet for outside assignments. Poor nutrition, which often goes hand in hand with poverty, may contribute to some students exhibiting a short attention span and sleepiness in class. Poverty may also mean that some students cannot afford to correct physical handicaps that impede learning, e.g. poor vision or hearing.

Implications:

Rosemary Wilson, assistant director of Curriculum for a school district in Philadelphia, asks an appropriate question of adult educators: "Could some of our limited success in teaching (adults) be the result of our failure to understand (their) problems and concerns?" Ms. Wilson goes on to pose the following questions to help teachers place themselves imaginatively in the shoes of students from poverty environments:

"What is it like never to hear standard English spoken in your home or immediate community?

What is it like never to have had a newspaper, book, or magazine in your home?

What is it like never to have seen anyone in your home write anything?

What is it like never to have had anyone read to you when you were little?

What is it like never to have traveled more than a few blocks from your home?"

We might add to those questions:

What is it like to grow up in a drug culture in which many of your peers and role models use or pedal drugs?

What is it like to know "world hunger" in a personal way, in terms of whether you had dinner last night or not?

Implications:

When obvious material lack or physical handicaps exist, it is appropriate for an interested teacher to seek to assist by referring students to potentially helpful social agencies.

VARIED ACADEMIC APPTITUDES

While a majority of undereducated adults are of average academic ability, and a few are of superior ability, it is a fact that some fall below average in academic learning ability.

Implications:

Teachers of adults with varying abilities will probably find that active methods of teaching, i.e. those that involve several of the students' senses, are the most effective. These include games, role playing (students acting out job

interviews or social situations), chain drills, in which students take turns asking and answering questions of each other, etc. If there is low aptitude for reading, it is more important than ever that the reading material selected is closely related to the students' everday interests or they will not be willing to struggle with it.

A booklet for teachers published by the Montgomery County (Md.) Literacy Council notes: "Fatigue will probably discourage your students and you can help them avoid it. Most of what a student does while working with you will be unfamiliar to him/her and will require special effort...Take a break. Introduce variety in your lesson plan. Try learning games. Enjoy some humor together. Help make the lessons something your students look forward to because you like each other and because they get a better feeling about themselves." Recognize that students have different learning styles. Allow for visual, oral/aural, individual or group modes of learning, and offer something for each.

CULTURALLY UNINFORMED

A recent national survey revealed that the less educated participate least in educational and cultural pursuits. Social workers have found that many people living in slum areas of large cities have never been farther than a few blocks from their homes; some are completely unaware of the existence of nearby libraries, museums, and other free sources of cultural enrichment. Sometimes those who do know about these places are hesitant to enter them because they are afraid that their lack of experience will be evident and will make them conspicuous -- that those in charge, those who "know how to act," will look down on them.

Implications:

Field trips to libraries, museums, and other culturally enriching public places, will help break the barrier that may exist between undereducated adults and sources of cultural enrichment available to everyone. A visit to a neighborhood library, for example, can make students aware that it offers access to services and information that may be of interest to them. It may convince them that they can learn how to use the facility just like everyone else. A teacher can tell students this is so, but they often will not really believe it unless and until they have had the experience.

DIFFERENT VALUES, ATTITUDES AND GOALS

An individual's cultural and economic environment greatly influences his/her social values, attitudes, and goals. Because lack of education and poverty often go hand in hand, and because adult education students come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, it is likely that adult students will have life experiences and value systems quite different from that of middle America. Many will have values quite different from their teachers'.

Implications:

It is important for a teacher of adult learners to accept these values and experiences as valid, and work with them. Implied or expressed criticism of a student's value system and attitudes will more than likely have but one result: the student will stop coming to class.

INEXPERIENCED WITH ACADEMIC GOALS AND GOAL-SETTING

Goals and goal-setting is an area of potential conflict between the student and the teacher. The adult learner may have a goal or goals entirely different than those which the teacher has set for him/her. For example, a student may have enrolled in class with the primary goal of finding social companionship, while the teacher has set goals for the student based on mastery of specific subject matter. It is important that each acknowleges, understands, and accepts the goal(s) set by the other.

The concept of long range planning may be new to some adult education students. Goal setting and long range planning is often closely tied to having or anticipating adequate financial resources. For those living in difficult financial circumstances, the idea of doing things today from which they may not benefit for several months, may be foreign. Long range goal-setting is usually most successful when teachers assist students in selecting and writing down their goals.

Implications:

Goal-fulfillment. When a teacher can find out through individual interviews or group discussion why each student is in class and what each one hopes to get out of the learning situation, s/he can do a better job of keeping them interested and helping them move toward their goals.

Discovery of Sub-Goals. It is inevitable that some things students practice or study may seem to them to have little relationship to their ultimate goal(s). It is up to the teacher to see to it that there is a relationship, and then to help students understand what the relationship is. Students usually see this better if they have some sub-goals to work toward along the way. For most, it is easier to relate daily tasks to lesser sub-goals and then to relate these sub-goals to the main goal(s). For example, when working with students who are poor readers and whose ultimate goal is to get a better job, a sub-goal might be to read job application forms of increasing levels of difficulty. Then when helping students read words like "experience," "education," and "references," the teacher can point out that these words are almost always found on job application forms and that being able to read them will move them toward their goal of a better job.

Psychologists note that the effort and perseverence necessary to accomplish long-term goals is best sustained by establishing sub-goals WHICH ARE ACHIEVABLE AND WHICH OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT AT REASONABLE INTERVALS.

PROBLEMS WITH MOTIVATION

Sometimes adult learners are highly motivated. They have made a decision and a commitment to themselves to enrich their lives. But among undereducated adults, motivation may also sometimes be low. Some adult students may be easily discouraged or may evidence an attitude of resignation due to past repeated failures at achieving society's widely accepted notion of "success."

Implications:

Motivation is probably the most basic element of learning. It is motivation that makes a student want to know, to understand, or to increase or acquire new skills.

It is up to the teacher to discover what his/her students' motivations are, to find ways to keep those motivations alive and to make use of students' motivations in the learning process. Some motivating factors are: the need for security, the need for better skills on the job, the need for self-esteem, the need for new experiences, the need for conformity, or conversely, the desire for nonconformity, or simply to learn more about the world we live in.

Most men and women who are involved in learning activities have one thing in common: They don't have to be there and may leave whenever they like. This lack of compulsary attendance challanges the teacher's ability to elicit student interest. If the classes drag, if the teaching techniques are boring, if the teacher doesn't spark and maintain the interest of the students, s/he may one day come to an empty classroom.

Here are some approaches that have been helpful in increasing motivation and in keeping it alive:

. Personalization Personal self-tests, self-quizzes, and self-revealing devices appeal strongly to most students. Few people can resist an opportunity to find out how well they do on self-tests. Witness the quizzes and other self-analysis devices so frequently published in magazines.

. Variety When students anticipate different, interesting things happening each class session, they are more likely to attend regularly. However, adult education teachers know that variety alone is not enough. All activities should contribute to the students' learning and growth, and move them toward their ultimate goals. To be different just to be different is not the answer.

. Teacher-Student Interaction When students feel that they are just one of the mob, when they receive little or no individual attention, they will probably drop from class, either physically or mentally, unless the reason for attending is a powerful one. The best teachers are those who convey that they like and value their students, and that they learn from them, too.

. Success Every student should be able to experience the joy of being successful. It is up to the teacher to provide each student with the opportunity to be successful in some area, on some level. The joy of even a small success can be the encouragement a student needs to want to continue learning.

CONFLICTING VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Some undereducated adults may not be able to articulate their ideas well. When this is true, much of their most important communication will be of the nonverbal sort. They may also tend to respond to the actions of others more than to their words.

Implications:

Teachers need to stay alert to any discrepancies between the verbal and nonverbal messages their students are sending. When the messages are not the same, it should signal the teacher that the student may be experiencing some conflicts in or about the class.

Teachers should also be aware that they themselves may be saying one thing verbally while saying another nonverbally through facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, etc. When there are conflicting messages, their adult students may respond more strongly to the nonverbal message as being the more "real."

FEELINGS OF HELPNESSNESS

If students doubt their ability to learn because of repeated past failures or a lack of self-confidence, their academic thinking processes can become blocked or retarded. Feelings of anger, anxiety, and helplessness may result. Sometimes these feelings are expressed as hostility toward the subject matter, fellow students, or occassionally, toward the teacher. Sometimes they may manifest as a persistant bewilderment or difficulty in grasping material, even after several explanations. A student's behavior may then take the form of a lack of participation and attention in class, procrastination or "forgetting," or the inability to start or continue to work alone.

Implications:

It is useful if the teacher can recognize these signs for what they are and, instead of reacting negatively or defensively toward them, do all s/he can to help students feel more in charge and to acquire feelings of self-confidence.

VARYING LEVELS OF INTELLIGENCE AND EXPERIENCE

All teachers will encounter students with varying degrees of intelligence. It is vital that we reject stereotypes of all kinds and maintain an uncritical and encouraging attitude toward each individual.

No two people learn alike. Also, one person's experience and background in a particular subject may be vastly different from that of another person's. If learning is to be an active, effective process, it is critical that the teacher recognize and make allowances for style differences and differences in learning rates.

Implications:

The teacher who recognizes these differences, and plans teaching activities accordingly, will help each student achieve maximum learning within the range of his/her own capabilities.

Some ways of determining individual differences are:

. Placement Testing A teacher can discover some individual differences when s/he first interviews students and tests them for their reading and math performance levels.

. Student Discussion Following a Film, Reading Selection, or Other Learning Experience A teacher may note that one student absorbs almost all the main facts or concepts covered, while another picks up only a few or none at all. Group discussions may also provide the teacher with some clues as to the best way to address these learning differences.

. Private Conference A private conversation can help a teacher get to know students as individuals. During a conference, learning difficulties and/or personal problems may surface. Information confided in a private conference can often help a teacher adjust his/her teaching to better meet that student's needs. Personal information should, of course, be kept in confidence.

. Independent Activities One way of allowing for individual learning differences within a group is to arrange a semi-independent activity that allows students some time to work alone, and permits more individual access to the teacher. Under this plan, the students may meet as a group some of the time, but for a large part of each class will work alone or in small sub-groups. The teacher then circulates and gives help to individuals or small groups as the need arises. Students who might hesitate to ask questions before the entire group will often feel free to ask them privately or in front of a small group.

HOSTILITY TOWARD AUTHORITY

Occasionally unpleasant past associations with representatives of authority (including teachers) may ressurect angry feelings or hostile behavior which is then directed toward the teacher. However, there is usually a respect for teachers that may be lacking toward other authority figures.

Implications:

Adult education teachers would do better to project themselves as friendly guides rather than as authorities. Occasionally students may have difficulty regarding teachers as friends, and a teacher may have to run the gamut of student hostility and defensiveness for awhile before his/her "niceness" is perceived as honest. But consistency of behavior and patience will usually win out.

INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Ways of behaving that are acceptable and even looked up to in the home or neighborhood environment are sometimes inappropriate in a classroom setting. Offensive language, non-standard speech, non-conventional ways of life, and "acting-out" behavior can sometimes make teachers critical -- either openly or silently.

This overt or silent criticism sets up a serious barrier between the teacher and the student. It alienates the student not only from the teacher, but also from what the teacher is trying to teach.

Implications:

Teachers need to look for the positive qualities and potential of the person who may be hiding behind inappropriate behavior. We need to make an effort to be non-judgmental, to not impose our own values, and to concentrate on those things students do well.

RETIENCE IN GROUPS

Many adults have difficulty expressing their feelings, presenting their needs, and standing up for their rights. These feelings are frequently even more prevalent among undereducated adults, some of whom may have developed undue respect for better-educated "others". When a teacher asks students questions, a lack of response should not necessarily be construed to mean that they don't know the answer. Silence may mean that they are shy about speaking up in groups. It may mean that thay are unaccustomed to anyone showing an interest in their opinions, or in them as individuals, and they don't know how to respond to this interest. It may mean that, in other situations, when they expressed their feelings or stood up for their rights, the reaction they received from others caused them to regret their openness. A teacher should also be aware that the degree of reticence will vary among different ethnic groups; e.g., Indians may tend be more silent and stoic, Hispanics more expressive, etc.

Implications:

One way to encourage free expression is to break the class into small groups for discussion; some people who sit silently in large groups will open up and participate more in a group of two or three.

USE OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS

The greater the lack of literacy skills, the more likely an adult student is to attempt to hide his/her inabilities from friends, from co-workers, and from the teachers. Some will use decoy mechanisms such as carrying a book or newspaper, carrying pencils in a conspicuous place, not having eyeglasses when asked to read, having an injured writing hand when asked for written work, or exhibiting well-developed oral expression. Students sometimes use decoy mechanisms during the initial interview with the teacher when s/he is trying to find out the individual's appropriate math or reading placement level.

Implications:

A teacher who is aware that these are cover-up mechanisms can respond as follows: "Well, it's not important that we read this immediately. But we might just see if there are any of these words you recognize, even without your glasses," or "I'm sorry to hear that you injured your hand. Let's just talk this time."

RIGHT TO DIGNITY AND SELF-WORTH

Insensitive use of names or nicknames may arouse antaganism and resentment.

Implications:

The teacher may want to initiate a general discussion on names -- how s/he prefers to be addressed, how each student prefers to be addressed, and how each one feels most comfortable addressing the teacher. Some will prefer the friendly informality of first names or nicknames both for themselves and for the teacher. Others will enjoy the dignity of being addressed as "Mr. or "Mrs." A good rule of thumb is to stay on an equal basis. Teacher and student either <u>both</u> address each other on a first name basis or both use "Mr." or "Mrs." and their surnames.

LOSS OF INTEREST

Adults will leave a classroom situation which doesn't fulfill their needs. When signs of apathy appear, a teacher must call upon all the teaching skill and perception at his/her command. S/he must try to discern the problem and to discover both his/her own and the students' part in the difficulty. Sometimes this can be accomplished within the classroom setting. Sometimes the situation calls for personal coversations between the teacher and individual students.

Implications:

The teacher might consider these measures:

- Personal Interview After class or during a break, teachers can express personal concern about a student and his/her work. A friendly, informal conversation over a cup of coffee may clarify the problem and uncover a workable solution.

- Guidance Counseling Every teacher does a certain amount of guidance counseling, consciously or otherwise. But sometimes the situation calls for someone with special training in that field. When a problem arises that indicates a visit to a trained counselor would be adviseable, the teacher may suggest this to the student. It may be advisable to make another staff member aware of the problem too, if it is a serious one.

- Private Tutoring This is an "above and beyond the call of duty" measure. Very few adult education administrators either ask or expect teachers to do free tutoring. Yet it is being done, and not infrequently. A few "after class" sessions with a student can sometimes eliminate a problem and persuade a potential dropout to persevere.

  Some teachers keep a tutor resource list for referring students to other sources of help. Sometimes input from a second source can provide encouraging reinforcement. A side benefit: students have been known to suddenly place more value on the "free" help they get in their basic education classes when they realize just how dear private tutoring can be.

- Standard Setting A teacher can help students set reasonable standards for themselves. Most people want to be better than average but, obviously, this is not possible if there is to be an average. A teacher can help students identify areas in which they can excel, make them feel good about those areas, and help them accept the idea that achievement in one area evens out an average or even less than average performance in another. Teachers need to be realistic about rates of student progress and help students set several, successive short-range attainable goals.

- Information Sharing It usually works best if teachers share their plan for the class with the students. Students like to know what is going on and what to expect next. The sharing may produce student suggestions that will help a teacher make the plan more workable and useful.

Not all undereducated adults will achieve to an equal degree. Some may achieve only minimal skills and understandings. Some may choose to cling to the familiar instead of adopting or adapting to the new. Others will experience significant achievement and success. We have only to look over the names of past and present political, social and artistic leaders to know that the list includes the names of some who were regarded as "different," "impossible," or even "stupid" by early teachers, parents, and other adults in authority positions. These people succeeded in spite of their early difficulties; some have probably succeeded because of them.

Our aim as adult educators ought to be to ease and to shorten the periods of learning difficulty as much as possible, and to help each adult learner achieve the maximum of which s/he is capable. If, in so doing, we can also support these adults in retaining some of the personal and cultural differences that make them special, our society will be the richer.

SUMMARY PROFILE OF THE UNDEREDUCATED ADULT

May lack self-confidence.

May fear competition.

May fear school, formal learning situations.

May be hesitant to reveal lack of knowledge.

May have attitudes, values and goals different from upper and middle class norms.

May live in an environment where education is not valued.

May be inexperienced in setting goals.

May have some hostility toward authority figures.

May employ defense mechanisms to avoid having real of imagined shortcomings known to others.

May experience feelings of helplessness.

May lack a positive self-image.

May lack confidence in own ability to learn.

May be unusually sensitive to non-verbal forms of communication.

May not have developed skills to sustain interest in learning.

Needs to experience immediate and ongoing success to maintain motivation.

Needs acceptance.

Expects teachers to have the ability to discriminate between "normal" and unusual behavior.

Expects teachers to keep information confidential.

Can learn and achieve goals.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS COMPARED WITH CHILD LEARNERS

- In addition to characteristics which may distinguish undereducated adult learners from better-educated adult learners, there are certain other characteristics which distinguish adult learners from child learners.

- Through years of living, adults tend to acquire set patterns of thinking and behavior and set ideas about what is right or wrong, fact or fiction. These patterns sometimes need to be "unset" in order for new learning to take place.

- Adults may be more impatient in the pursuit of learning objectives. They are less tolerant of "busy work", seeking instead work which has immediate and direct application to their objectives. Adults are perhaps less likely to be distracted from learning by social interests, and tend to be steadier in the pursuit of knowledge.

- Most adults have jobs and/or families. They have many responsibilities competing with education for their time. Evening students in particular may be tired when they come to class, and may have neither the time nor the energy for "homework".

- Because adults have had more years of living they are more readily able to relate new facts to experience than are children. This adds enrichment and reinforcement to the learning process. With a broader perspective of life than their younger counterparts, adults can generally see a relatedness of things not usually discerned by children.

- Unlike children, adults do not comprise a captive audience. They are non-compulsory and voluntarily attend classes for a variety of reasons: educational, social, recreational, and sometimes from a sense of obligation. Their voluntary attendance will probably cease if they don't find what they came for.

- Personal differences increase with age and geographic mobility. Therefore, adults come from an even wider and more complex variety of backgrounds than do youth.

- Adults are used to being treated as mature persons and rightly resent having teachers who treat them otherwise. For many, the decision to return to school has been a major one. Having made this important decision, adult learners have the right to expect to be treated as adults.

III. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LEARNING

People tend to enjoy and repeat those activities which are pleasant and satisfying and to avoid those which are not. If an adult enrolls in a course expecting to learn to read and quickly finds that s/he is learning and enjoying the process, that person will probably continue to attend class. "Nothing succeeds like success" is a truth that should be taken to heart by every teacher.

First impressions are often lasting. This means that those first classes are very important. The teacher's challenge is to arouse interest, to create a sense of need and a desire to learn, and to help the students approach learning constructively and efficiently.

A skill not practiced or knowledge not used will be largely lost or forgotten. Most teachers recognize the value of repetition for reinforcing newly gained knowledge or skills. Important items should be reviewed soon after the initial instruction.

The more often an act is repeated, the more quickly a habit is established. Practice makes perfect--if one is practicing the right thing in the right way. Practicing the wrong thing the wrong way will become a perfectly wrong habit. Teachers should be sure that their students are doing exercises correctly.

Finally, a vivid, dramatic or exciting learning experience is more likely to be remembered than a routine or boring experience. This doesn't mean the classroom should be a theatre-in-the-round. But good teachers have the ability to bring their subject matter to life. When clear and unusual examples and interesting support materials are used, both teaching and learning can be an exciting experience.

IV. DEVELOPING AN INDIVIDUALIZED "PRESCRIPTION PLAN"

A "prescription plan is an individually designed instructional program of learning based upon:

- Written, oral and observational testing.
- The student's literacy level.
- The student's previous educational experiences.
- The student's goals.
- Consideration of any learning difficulties or biases.

The degree of emphasis put upon any skill area or number of sessions devoted to any learning area will depend upon the above. A prescription plan will include the following:

- A written description of the student's learning needs to meet his/her short-range and long-range goals.
- Suggestions for instructional materials and techniques to be a part of the student's learning experiences.
- Examples of learning experiences to be presented.
- Estimated time for accomplishment.

Prescriptive planning takes place after formal and informal testing and diagnosis. However, since each day of working with a student will reveal more about him/her, implementing this prescription plan should be a flexible matter, allowing for adjustments along the way.

V. CONSIDERATIONS IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION INSTRUCTION

Many adult education instructional materials are self-checking. Initially some students feel they must, above all, have the right answer and may, to assure this, copy the answers. Students usually discontinue copying answers when they perceive the instructor is more interested in their understanding the process than in their having the right answer, and when they realize they will not be compared to others.

Here are some suggestions for working with new adult basic education students:

1. Carefully explain the method of instruction, materials used, and any formal or informal testing procedures.

2. During students' initial involvement in the program, closely supervise their efforts, i.e. be sure they are using materials correctly and provide encouragement at every opportunity.

3. While encouraging students to work independently, remain visable, interested, alert to students' difficulities, and ready to assist.

4. Frequently provide students with evidence of their progress. Charts and graphs, when they are properly presented, provide good visual evidence.

5. Discourage absenteeism by making the classroom an interesting and friendly place.

6. Students may become bogged down and discouraged by unrealistic expectations of "overnight" results. Frequent instructor-student dialogue can help keep expectations reasonable, clarify direction, and sharpen motivation.

Adults who lack basic education exist on the edge of a society rich in its cultural offerings. The technological revolution, expecially in the areas of communication, has widened the edge. As adult educators, it is our job to do more than help individuals become better equipped to function as wage earners. We should also concern ourselves with helping our students become partakers of the fullness and richness of the broader society.